

SERMON FOR ST.PAUL'S SUNDAY JUNE 7TH,2020 (LIVE RECORDING)

TEXT: MATT.28 : 16-20

Today, we are celebrating the 60th Anniversary of the consecration of St.Paul's which occurred on May 15th; we are celebrating a long-standing visible symbol of our faith community's presence in the Macedon Ranges and beyond. Today, we also celebrate one of life's greatest mysteries : God as Trinity. What difference does understanding God as Trinity make to our mission as Jesus' disciples, called, as we are in today's reading from Matthew, to make disciples? Some reflection on the nature of the Triune God may be helpful.

The Holy Trinity is a mystery beyond our complete understanding. All human analogies of the divine life in God fall short in some respect yet divinely inspired they offer us valuable insight. Historically, God has revealed Godself seeking reconciliation with humankind via the Father, Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity defined as these three equal persons is helpful. However, it has its limitations for us modern people. God is not three different personalities, each with an individual self-awareness. Rather, the Greek Fathers meant by 'person' the appearance to the outsider of a distinct aspect, face or voice. For example, the three faces or persons of the Triune God are always facing each other in perfect unity as illustrated by Rublev's icon.

The nature of the unity of the three persons is well expressed by the Greek term 'perichoresis' which means a mutual indwelling, a constant mutual exchange. God as Trinity is then understood as a communion or community of mutual love.

As well as perfectly united in love, I would want to add perfectly united in will to a Trinitarian understanding. Jesus and the Spirit are always in perfect accord with the Father's will.

God is a community of love, three equal persons, perfectly united in love, perfectly united in will.

According to Genesis 1, we are created in God's image. This has important implications for our mission of making disciples. If God is a community of mutual love, and we are made in God's image, then love needs to be the basis of our mission approach. Just as God in Jesus teaching and cross identified with the poor, the stranger, the outcast, the unjustly treated in society, so we need to reflect in both word and deed God's love for people doing it tough. In a COVID19 and post COVID-19 world, this aspect of our mission is crucial.

Genesis 1 says part of being made in God's image is our calling to be good stewards of creation. Hence, our loving words and deeds must include care for God's creatures and the environment. Such contexts also offer opportunities for discipling.

The ways of discipleship making are many and varied but they need to be loving and contextualised. Jesus responded to each person as an individual and varied his approach, according to their particular human situation and need. He did not use standard formulas. He did not presume to know a person's needs without first listening to them, spending time with them. He did not volunteer answers to questions that they were not asking. He did not always ask people to repent of their sins. He did not always proclaim all of the gospel to every person.

Christian disciple making is a loving invitation not an ultimatum to avoid God's wrath and eternal punishment and win a ticket to heaven.

Rather, Christian discipleship making is a loving invitation to make our peace with God/make friends with God/ be

reconciled with God through Jesus who showed us what God is like – loving and forgiving.

The Triune God's offer of forgiveness for our incompleteness, our brokenness, our sin is made out of love for us, that, in accepting it, we might know life at its best, life's ultimate meaning and purpose, following Jesus, listening to the Spirit, dwelling eternally with the love of God.

Disciplemaking requires a humble attitude. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus required humility of his disciples, that is, that they become like children who, in Jesus' day, unlike ours, were of low social status, as were the poor. In Matthew's gospel, being poor was also a condition of discipleship which gives us food for thought!

The disciples in Matthew's gospel were vulnerable, like many of us – a mixture of faith and doubt. Yet, Jesus called them to disciple making, as he does with us. Like the disciples in Matthew's gospel, we have Jesus reassuring presence always with us; if we have Jesus, we also have the Father and the Spirit's love eternally sustaining us.

We need to be faithful in our mission of disciple making, putting that loving invitation out there, guided by Jesus' teaching and example. However, it is the Triune God who calls disciples, not us. The Triune God loves people into discipleship through us: the Father's self-giving love united with the Son on the cross, and with the Spirit who gives life, convicting people of their need for repentance and reconciliation.

The Triune God invites us all to be part of His/Her community of love, the Triune God calls us to be faithful disciples in word and deed, uniting our will with Him/Her, making disciples as Jesus did.

The Lord be with you.